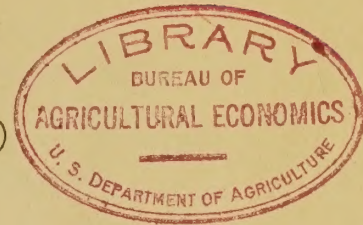


THE JOADS' KIDS GET A BREAK
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The adjustment to a new place was hard for the people who had lived for generations in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. Isolated from the world at large, they farmed their barren acres until the Government retired the land, and the families were relocated on the Shenandoah Homesteads.

There were some complaints. One homesteader missed the cold spring water. Another said he wasn't used to farming this kind of land. But there was one constant refrain in their talk. It was simply, "It's better for the chillun this-a-way. They wouldn't 'a got no schoolin' up on thet mountain." Or, "The chillun'll git more larnin' than I'll eveh heve."

The Farm Security Administration has made "schoolin'" possible for thousands of rural farm youth, not so much through an organized program of education--the local school districts and the added teachers and libraries supplied by the Work Projects Administration have provided this--but by making possible the physical facilities to house a school. The Farm Security Administration in the educational field might be described as a clearing house through which other agencies act. It has certified the rural youth on its homestead projects to NYA, CCC camps, and has taken advantage of all educational opportunities offered. Yet, in the very nature of its work on its 162 homestead projects, the Farm Security Administration has also had an influence in adapting rural education to meet the needs of particular groups.

The lack of rural schools in many areas was recognized long before the Farm Security Administration established its rural homesteads. Educational facilities for rural youth are meager. Paradoxically, the best and most adequate educational facilities are concentrated in areas which have the fewest children in relation to the total population.

For instance, the Southeastern states, predominantly agricultural, support more than 13 percent of the nation's children from five to seventeen years of age, but receive only 2 percent of the national income. With more than twenty times this income or 42 percent, the Northeastern states support only twice as many children. In Mississippi,

it would take 99 percent of the state's total tax income to put its educational expenditure per child on a par with the national average.

Illiteracy is especially prevalent in the states with large reservoirs of surplus youth. The South has the highest birth rate in the nation, yet it ranks lower in educational opportunities than any other area in the nation, except Arizona and New Mexico.

According to a 1932 report, one urban child in four was attending high school, as contrasted with one rural child in seven of the school population. About one in twenty rural farm youth from fifteen to twenty-four years old was illiterate in 1930; less than one in one hundred urban youth in the same age group was illiterate.

Added to the specific problem of limited educational opportunity, there is a pressing economic problem among the farm families helped by the Farm Security Administration. Most of these families had touched bottom. Drought and flood followed on the heels of the depression. Farm prices collapsed and foreclosures mounted. Farmers who had no security but their farming ability were refused credit by harassed bankers. By 1933, there were a million farm families on relief.

The Farm Security Administration has extended credit and guidance in farm and home management to more than 800,000 farm families who once were on or near relief. As a result, more than 186,000 children of school age in these families have been enabled to attend school.

It was impossible, however, to rehabilitate many needy farm people through credit alone. Many families had become stranded in wornout farming areas, cut-over forests or exhausted mining communities. They could never make a decent living where they were; yet without assistance, they could not make a new start on better land. Consequently, FSA is helping about 14,000 of these rural families to establish new homes on productive land on 162 homestead projects scattered throughout every State.

Better living standards for these farm families involved education, not only for the children but for the grownups as well. A new house, a new barn and enough acreage to support the family was only the first step in a long process of material and social rehabilitation. The old system of the single cash crop, the insufficient diet of pork, meal and molasses, the unsanitary living conditions had been ingrained into the habits of many of these people. Education in the larger sense as a training for actual living was necessary.

Before such a program could be put into effect, however, schools had to be provided. The location of many projects cut across school district lines; in other areas, the local district could not provide schools. To meet this need, the Farm Security Administration built thirty-two school-community buildings, twenty-six community buildings, nine school buildings, fourteen health buildings and twelve teacherages. These are leased or deeded to state and county school authorities with

the provision that they be used only for educational and community purposes by the families of the area.

The concept behind the planning of these buildings was that they should be a vital part of the community. They are not so much schools as they are community buildings, where persons of all ages may meet for socials, business meetings, classes, fairs, and the like. Most of the school and community buildings are functionally designed and have large auditoriums, kitchens, nurseryrooms, libraries, health clinics, vocational shops, and classrooms. Recreational facilities are also provided in the school grounds. They are centrally located so that transportation will not be a handicap to education.

There have been numerous ways in which the Farm Security Administration has cooperated with local, county, and state officials to encourage rural education, besides building school structures. It has helped to consolidate some of the rural schools, so that better equipment and a higher standard of teaching may be obtained by the rural youth. In one county the FSA persuaded two adjacent school districts to agree that one district was to build a school and the other district was to send all its students to the new building.

Many of the youths on the homestead projects would get no chance at education if it were not for other government agencies. The reports from various projects testify to this cooperation.

Even Farm Security Administration employees are fired by the idea of giving an education to some rural child. In one area FSA employees have started a Student Loan Fund which already has enabled ten children from projects to attend college.

To some degree, the Farm Security Administration has influenced the trend of rural education. This trend has been away from the formalized courses of study outlined by the state departments of education to a more functional type of education. The reason for this is that many rural families are handicapped even in their everyday living by habits left over from the old ways of life.

In many rural schools, for example, text-book hygiene is taught year after year to children who are suffering from bad teeth, hookworm, and malnutrition. Teachers are finding out for themselves that a purely academic program does little to relieve the distress of such children or further their education.

The Farm Security Administration's belief that the schools on its projects should provide a practical approach to everyday problems--such as health, earning a living, getting on with others, and contributing to the general welfare--is influencing many local school authorities to carry on a program of functional education. In one school, the children raised their own garden to provide themselves with hot school lunches, and their mothers cooperated by canning the beans,

tomatoes, corn and peas which the children raised.

One teacher, investigating the cause of an absence due to typhoid, learned that families previously living in the same house had been similarly infected. The school studied this disease, examined the house and grounds and found that the family's open well was in low ground. The father located another well properly and dug it. The children then filled the old well and screened the doors and windows of the house. Typhoid was permanently eliminated from that particular home and the children gained a practical knowledge which would stand them in good stead.

Most rural schools use text-books couched in terms familiar to the city dweller but which have little relation to rural life. Most universities and normal schools train their teachers to adjust themselves to urban teaching where there are more opportunities and higher salaries. As a result, there is little or no shaping of the school system to fit the needs of farm people.

In Coffee County, Alabama, where a fully-rounded experiment is going on to raise the standards of five hundred farm families located on poor land, a new approach is also being made to education. Instead of the old type of text-book, with its problems having little bearing upon the daily life of the student, teachers have substituted actual problems brought to them by agricultural workers on the farms and in the homes of the students.

For instance, a problem reads, "Cured pork sells for thirty cents a pound, but it can be raised on a farm for seventeen and one-half cents per pound. Find the saving in a year's food supply, assuming that it requires 328 pounds of meat a year." Or, "There were 229 deaths and 417 births in Coffee County during 1937. The population is 34,069. What is the birth and death rate per thousand population for the county?"

Instead of the teacher pushing the pupils as is done in most schools, the pupils of Coffee County are pushing the teachers.

Adult programs have proved just as important on homestead projects as the training of the younger people. They are pathetically eager to learn. As one woman expressed it, "We've been nothin' but cotton patch folks without sense enough to know we didn't know nothin'." We know now, and we're goin' to change."

That is the attitude that has given rise to "Neighborhood Training Days" which are really short courses given over a period of three or four days on such different topics as "cooperative buying and selling," "hay production and storage," "woodwork," "care of floors" and "first aid." Neighboring farm families are invited to the project during such training periods. There are many other activities in training too numerous to be classified, ranging from Child Health Week programs to the co-operative association that sent five of its members to Purdue University

Extension School for a short course.

One of the most valuable functions that informal education on the homestead projects has performed is its demonstration value to the many families living outside the projects. Many devices besides "training days" are used to overcome a typical situation reported by one teacher, who said, "There was at first a feeling of apprehension and some jealousy on the part of the old residents toward the homesteaders and rather aloof attitude on the part of some of the new community residents. The walls are gradually being broken down and the homesteaders have been making steady efforts to win the confidence of their neighbors."

The relation between this particular project community and the surrounding area was cemented by many ties. Children from outside areas attended the schools in the homestead communities, and the Parent-Teacher Associations had equal representation from both groups. Homestead residents joined the neighborhood churches, and the outside church groups used the school auditorium for their suppers. No one is excluded from membership in such groups as the Boy or Girl Scouts, home demonstration clubs, drama clubs, study groups and nursery school. Athletic teams for older boys are made up of boys living both inside and outside the project. They use the gymnasium and are supervised by project leaders. Health provisions, such as school examinations, summer round-ups, immunization and vaccination, hot school lunches, books, and adequate clothing are extended to all children, especially the disadvantaged from the surrounding area.

It is common on most of the projects, to have attendance at meetings swelled by the outside group. In Burlington, North Dakota, recently an adult education program was initiated on a community rather than a project basis. The idea for the program came from the homesteaders, but the whole community is developing it with the Superintendent of Schools as the chairman of a committee of five. Two of the committee members are from the projects, the rest from the outlying district.

Closely related to the general program of rehabilitation and resettlement is the migrant situation in California and Arizona. The plight of the migrants is really an acute manifestation of what would have happened to thousands of additional farmers in Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, and Kansas if the Farm Security Administration had not aided them to become self-supporting in their home communities through a program of "supervised credit." Such aid, however, could not keep up with the rapid increase in farm mechanization and the displacement of many tenants and sharecroppers from the land.

There are now at least 350,000 American families who are migrants, following the crops in rickety automobiles from State to State. Usually their only homes are temporary roadside camps which seldom have any kind of sanitary facilities. Malnutrition and disease are common among both adults and children. The children of migrants have little chance for adequate medical care or normal community life, much less education.

A recent survey in California conducted by the State Department of Education and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the Department of Agriculture revealed that more than 186,000 migrant children, representing 116,000 families, had moved into California during the last nine years.

Some educational opportunities for these children are provided by the State Department of Education. In some communities, migrant children are segregated from the community schools; in others, they join the regular classes. The handicaps under which migrant children must get their schooling makes it difficult for the school authorities to prescribe a definite school plan. The attendance of migrant children is irregular and strongly conditioned by the economic necessity for work. When work in the field declines, attendance is heavy; when more work is available, the attendance of migratory children at the schools drops in spite of all the truant officers' efforts. One father remarked that he took his family to Arizona for the cotton-picking because the whole family could work there. "Same school law," he said, "but not so strict."

The constant movement of migrants from one crop to another, sometimes a thousand miles away, has made a normal school year impossible for their children. Backwardness has resulted. The average migrant child is one year behind the average school child although he is on a par with the average student in the class.

A preliminary study made by E. J. Rowell shows increasing retardation of migrant children from the eighth grade on. This may have some relation to the increased economic worth of the youth as a day laborer. Up to the eighth grade, children showed an average retardation of one year. From nine years old and up, an increasing number failed to keep pace with normal advancement. About 27 percent of the children were retarded one grade at the age of nine; 41 percent were retarded one or more grades at the age of ten; 66 percent, one or more grades at the age of eleven; about 69 percent at age twelve, and 84 percent at age fourteen.

The greater age and poorer dress of the migrant children has raised a social barrier that removes the children and their parents one step farther from the contacts of normal community life. As one migrant mother explained, "They said of my child on the school ground, 'He's from the county camp.' that makes it hard. Pretty soon the children begin to think they're not equal. That's a draw-back to this education."

So far the Farm Security Administration has been able to do little toward education of migrant children beyond making available community buildings for school purposes in some of its seventeen camps located in California, Arizona, Oregon, and Washington. Emergency teachers and books are supplied by the local school authorities.

Hot lunches, medical care and sanitary facilities are also provided for the children in the FSA camps. The little aid toward education which the FSA has given these children is summed up in the remark of a school superintendent, "I used to be able to spot a migrant child in the class-

room right away. Now, it's getting harder to do."

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